

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS



THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE

A DOUBLE PLAY

or Two Mysteries in One Net

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



SHIELD WEEKLY



TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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A DOUBLE PLAY;

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TWO MYSTERIES IN ONE NET.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A DEED IN THE NIGHT.

"We'll take a carriage, Detective Keene; the case is not an ordinary one."

The speaker was Chief Inspector Watts.

He was ascending the stairway which gives egress from the office of the inspectors of police and rises to the plane of the sidewalk and roadbed of Pemberton square.

The portly figure of the chief inspector was nearly enveloped in a heavy frieze overcoat, which he was buttoning closer around him and drawing the collar well up about his neck. His florid features wore an expression of unusual gravity, and the penetrating complacency habitual to his searching blue eyes had given place to a look of severity and determination. Chief Watts never wore this expression unless a case was, indeed, an extraordinary one.

His companion was Detective Sheridan Keene, whose fresh, forceful countenance, a

veritable picture of keen intelligence and virile manhood, carried a mute inquiry which at once indicated that he was not yet informed of the matter which had suddenly claimed the serious attention of the chief that morning.

It was a morning in January, and close upon nine o'clock. The air was crisp and cold, the sky cloudless, well becoming a typical winter day.

An inch or two of snow had fallen during the night, the surface of which was frozen hard, and glistened with dazzling brilliancy in the morning sunlight. It had clothed the streets and squares and buildings, even, with a mantle of white, like a chaste garment. Nor was the effect lost upon human nature, even, for more people than usual were bright and smiling on that bright winter morning.

"What is the case, chief?" asked Sheridan Keene, as the former signed the driver of a carriage that stood near the curbing to remove the blankets from his horses.

"A bad break, I infer," replied Chief

Watts, opening the carriage door. "Take either seat."

"House or store?"

"Store."

"Where to, chief?" the driver ran to ask.

"Kennedy & Hicks', Tremont street."

"The jewelers!" exclaimed Keene, and the bang of the closed door was mingled with his words.

"Yes," Chief Watts replied, as the wheels rolled crunching through the crust of the snow. "Hicks just telephoned down to me. I did not wait for any details, yet I heard enough to lead me to look into the matter in person."

"Any idea of the loss?"

"Not yet."

"Safe opened?"

"I understood Hicks to say it was blown open," replied Chief Watts, "but I think he was so excited that he could not have told whether it had been blown or drilled. The burglary was discovered by the boy who opens the store in the morning. He was so alarmed and excited, when he entered the shop and saw what had occurred, that he immediately closed and locked the door and ran to Hicks' residence, on St. Bartolph street, with the news."

"Why didn't he call an officer?"

"Probably he was rattled. He'll grow wiser as he grows older. It will be quite as well for us, however, that he did not call an officer."

"Why so, chief?"

"Because we shall find things undisturbed," Chief Watts explained. "Hicks came right down, and on seeing the state of things he immediately telephoned to me. I told him to let things alone till I arrived."

"A good idea."

"Do you know what time it began snowing last night?"

"Not until after midnight, chief," replied Keene. "I cannot say how long after."

"I thought we, perhaps, might find some evidence—ah, here we are!"

The carriage had drawn nearer the curbing, and stopped in front of an attractive jewelry store on Tremont street, not far from the magnificent Hotel Touraine. A group of men and boys was on the sidewalk, and Chief

Watts, immediately upon alighting, said sharply to an approaching patrolman:

"Disperse these people, officer! Send them about their business, if they have any, and keep this way clear."

The patrolman touched his helmet.

Sheridan Keene threw a quick glance over the front of the store and building.

Messrs. Kennedy and Hicks were evidently men of old-time customs, for the single broad window of their store was shielded from accident and felonious designs by black wooden shutters, which had not yet been removed that morning. The door was at one side, the glass of which was likewise protected. Yet none of these shutters was so high that a man of medium height could not have looked over it and into the shop.

A neat brass sign was attached to either side of the receding entrance, bearing in black letters the name of the firm. The door at once was opened, showing the interior of the shop, which was rather narrow, but of considerable depth.

Immediately adjoining the entrance, yet entirely separate from it, was a door giving egress to a stairway which belonged to a single flat, or tenement, which was both above the jewelry store and the next store up the street, which was a shoe store. The door and stairway of the tenement was between the two shops, and these several divisions, the two stores and the tenement overhead, occupied the entire building.

From the door of the tenement the door-plate of some occupant had evidently been removed quite recently, for some of the dust which collects back of these plates still cleaved to the face of the door. That the tenement had not again been let, or at least was not occupied, was also apparent, for the blinds of all the front windows were securely closed.

The practiced and comprehensive eye of a detective observes at a glance such superficial features as these, and Sheridan Keene, without further need to examine the exterior, immediately followed Chief Watts into the store. There was a single long counter, with attractive show cases, reaching nearly the length of the store on the left side. Back of this were glass cupboards filled with various

pieces of silver, and underneath these a cabinet of drawers reaching to the floor. The bare wall at the right of the shop was that adjacent to the entry of the tenement.

At the rear of the store was a square safe nearly six feet high, and so situated that it could be seen from the street, except only one small section, which was obscured by the end of the counter. Half of the safe door had been ruptured by an explosion, and the other half now stood open.

There were but three persons in the store when the detective entered. One was a lad of fifteen years, who was talking in excited whispers to a man of thirty or thereabouts, both of whom were employed in the store.

The third person was a man of sixty, with a slender, stooping figure, as if bowed by many years' work over a jeweler's bench.

His hair was sparse and gray, his features thin and shaven, and he wore gold-bowed spectacles.

Upon hearing the detectives enter, he turned quickly from the safe, at which he was ruefully gazing, and hurriedly approached them.

This gentleman was Mr. Matthew Hicks, the junior member of the firm of Kennedy & Hicks.

CHAPTER II.

CURIOUS EVIDENCE.

"Good - morning, good - morning, Chief Watts!" exclaimed Mr. Hicks, as he approached and shook the inspector's hand. "Here's a pretty mess!"

Chief Watts glanced down the deep store.

"A pretty mess, indeed," he observed, in a serious and quite sympathetic way. "Close the street door, Detective Keene, please."

"I will lock it if you wish."

"Perhaps it will be well, Mr. Hicks, until I have finished my investigation," nodded the chief inspector. "Are things about as you found them here this morning?"

"Almost precisely, chief," the proprietor waited to reply before going to the door. "I have merely examined some of the safe-drawers, which I find have been robbed of their contents."

"Is your loss much?"

"Several thousand dollars, at least. It is the first experience of the kind that we have ever suffered, although we have been in business here for nearly thirty years."

"I will make an investigation," said Chief Watts, gravely.

Accompanied by Sheridan Keene, he walked to the rear of the store. He bestowed only a glance upon the two employees who were back of the counter, and at once approached the safe. A brief examination of the work done in drilling the ruptured door seemed to satisfy him, for he almost immediately arose from his study of it, saying softly to Sheridan Keene:

"It is the work of a professional, and remarkably well done."

"Here is a part of a broken bit."

"Ah, yes! Notice the quality of the tool. I at once suspected something of this kind when Hicks telephoned to me and said the safe had been blown open. The locality of the store is not one that would have attracted a novice in burglary."

"What do you think of it, Chief Watts?" inquired Mr. Hicks, now returning.

"I am not yet prepared to say," was the evasive reply. "The work was done by an old hand at the business, however. I presume you keep a light burning here during the night, do you not?"

"Invariably, sir."

"Was last night any exception?"

"No, sir," and Mr. Hicks shook his head. "This arm on the chandelier in front of the safe was found lighted as usual this morning."

"Is there a private watchman, who makes rounds of the stores in this district regularly during the night?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is his name?"

"Bradbury, sir. I think it is Thomas Bradbury."

"How long has he been in the employ of the several firms?"

"Fully a dozen years."

"He's off duty now, I suppose?"

"He goes off at six in the morning, chief."

"Then you have not seen him since this robbery was discovered?" observed Chief Watts. "Send one of your clerks to his house,

with instructions for him to come here at once."

Mr. Hicks turned to give the necessary directions and the chief glanced at a large, square piece of black cloth which Sheridan Keene had found upon the floor and was then examining.

"What do you make of that, Chief Watts?" asked Hicks, reverting to the inspector.

Chief Watts smiled faintly.

"I presume your watchman, as well as the regular policeman who patrols this neighborhood, is expected to look into this store each time he walks by it, is he not?" he asked, quietly.

"Surely, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Hicks. "That is a part of his duty."

"Well, Mr. Hicks," replied the chief, "the burglar who opened this safe was in some way warned of the approach of either of these guardians of your property each time that he came round on his beat. This cloth was used for the purpose of masking your safe until the watchman had passed. You will observe, sir, that the safe is quite a distance from the street door. A mere glance into the store would hardly have revealed the artifice. Both policemen and watchmen become gradually careless and indifferent in looking after stores and districts which have been noticeably free from affairs of this kind."

"I have no doubt of that, sir."

"Furthermore, Mr. Hicks, a watchman unfortunately forms the habit of carelessness after years of service, and is very liable to slight his duty. He gets into a way of thinking that nothing is wrong, because nothing has been wrong. Give me, for reliability, a new watchman in preference to an old one. Your burglar knew this as well as I do, Mr. Hicks. On being warned of the approach of the watchman or the policeman, or of any other person, in all probability he immediately masked his work at your safe and crouched below the end of your counter until the danger had passed. Have you discovered how his entrance was effected?"

"By the way of the basement," replied Hicks. "If you wish, I will show you."

"Do so, please."

The basement stairs were at one side, and

these the three men now descended. They led to a small, square basement, or cellar, with a cemented floor. It was lighted by one narrow, grated window, opening directly upon the Tremont street sidewalk. A furnace occupied the middle of the cellar, and a bin for coal was under the sidewalk.

In the brick wall to the left was a heavy iron door, standing open, through which could be seen an adjacent cellar.

"The burglar came through that door, Chief Watts," explained Mr. Hicks.

Chief Watts examined the door. It was very solid, with an iron casing set into the stonework of the wall. But the lock of the door had been entirely removed, a bit having been used to cut around it. On the floor of the adjoining cellar were the metal shavings which had fallen, and stains of the oil which had dropped from the bit during the work.

Chief Watts shrugged his shoulders disapprovingly.

"What cellar is this, Mr. Hicks?" he demanded, quite sharply.

"It belongs to the tenement over my store and the adjoining shoe store."

"How does it happen that such a communication exists between the two cellars? You should have had sufficient head to have foreseen some such break as this."

"I admit that I have thought of it," replied Hicks, coloring slightly under the chief's censure; "and I frequently have thought of having the doorway walled up, despite that it has not yet been done. I presume the same carelessness inheres in me as in a watchman. As nothing had happened, I imagined that nothing would happen."

"Well, you have paid the price for your imagination," observed Chief Watts, dryly. "Why was the door made here, to begin with?"

"I will tell you why," explained Hicks. "When the building was remodeled, and the two stores built to make the tenement above, my partner and myself leased the store we now occupy."

"How long ago was that?"

"That was nearly thirty years ago, sir."

"Well?"

"At that time," continued Hicks, "I also

leased and lived in the tenement. There was no coal bin in the tenement cellar at that time, and I used the one out yonder. Hence the door was necessary. I had it built at that time, and as I was occasionally away nights it was constructed with what we thought was sufficient security against burglars, who might attempt to break into the tenement and thence into our store during my temporary absence. I gave up the tenement about five years ago, and the door has since remained locked. We have always kept ourselves well informed of the character of the people overhead, and have in a way felt it was safe enough. I admit, however, that the door should have been removed and a wall built; but it has never been done, and there you are."

"Is the tenement now vacant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was the previous occupant?"

"A man by the name of Reed, with a wife and three children. He vacated about a month ago."

"Do you know anything about Reed?"

"He is in the provision business on Market street, and has an excellent reputation. I am not inclined to think that he knows anything about this affair."

"How long did he occupy the tenement?"

"About three years."

"Who before him?"

"A man named Nutt," was the reply. "The man is a druggist, and now lives over his own store."

"Any other?"

"No, sir. They are the only occupants since I gave up the tenement five years ago."

"Who has the letting of it?"

"Mr. Kelcey, the real estate agent in Boylston street. I believe he is also part owner of the building."

"Send your clerk to Mr. Kelcey's office, please," commanded Chief Watts, "and ask him to come around here at once."

"I will do so. He will probably be in his office at this hour."

Mr. Hicks hastened up-stairs, leaving Chief Watts and Detective Keene in the basement.

"These people have got just what they have invited," said the chief, with dry austerity.

"The idea of allowing that door to remain, despite that it is an iron one."

"A serious negligence, indeed," nodded Keene. "Shall we enter the tenement?"

"By all means! Lead the way."

The cellar was similar to that from which they turned, and the two detectives ascended the stairway. They found the door at the top unlocked, and entered a narrow hall, cold, dim and dismal. The street door was at one end, and directly opposite this was a stairway making to the rooms above.

"We will go up," remarked Chief Watts.

At the street door he abruptly halted. His searching eyes had detected upon the uncarpeted floor near the door several damp spots and a few particles of frozen snow and bits of ice.

"Here you have it, Keene!" exclaimed the chief, softly. "You said it did not begin to snow until after midnight. If no person has entered this tenement upon legitimate business this morning, here are very reliable signs that the burglars entered by this front door, presumably with a key."

"No doubt of it, Chief Watts," said Sheridan Keene. "There was no snow or dampness in the street yesterday. This must have been brought in here since midnight. There is no question about that."

"We will take a look up-stairs."

They ascended the flight together, both observing that the dust on the banister rail had been disturbed by the hand of some person who had recently preceded them.

"Did you notice that?" asked Sheridan Keene.

Chief Watts nodded.

"Some one has been up here before us. A person looking at the tenement yesterday, however, may have run his hand over this rail. We will question Mr. Kelcey, the landlord, a little later."

"Here is the front room, the one directly over the jewelry store," said Keene, opening a door in the second hall near the head of the stairs.

"So I observe— Well, well, here's a curious circumstance!" Chief Watts broke off to exclaim.

The light in the room was dim, for the green blinds outside the two windows were

closed and fastened. The room was entirely empty and without a carpet. That which had attracted the attention of Chief Watts and the detective consisted of a dozen or more small squares of tinfoil, which were scattered upon the floor near the window directly over the door of the jewelry store. These pieces of foil evidently had been the wrappers of as many oblong tablets of sweet chocolate, such as most all confectioners have on sale, with a square piece of thin paper in each, advertising the manufacturer. The floor was strewn with these papers also.

"Evidently one of these burglars had a sweet tooth in his head," laughed Sheridan Keene, picking up one of the pieces of foil.

Chief Watts knelt down and studied the floor for several minutes.

"I am not much inclined to believe it was a he!" he presently replied. "Notice that the floor here by the window is damp, also, where the person stood for a considerable time, as if the snow on the shoes or rubbers had been melted by the warmth of the feet. Keene," he added, quickly, "the person who stood here, and who watched out from this window while that safe was being cracked, was—a woman!"

"Do you really think so, Chief Watts?" demanded Keene, with some excitement. "It seems improbable that a woman could have been engaged in such a break as this."

"It is a fact, nevertheless," cried Chief Watts. "Here in the dust on the floor is the mark of a rubber, evidently nearly new. Notice the fine crisscross lines with which rubbers are marked? Here is a place where they are quite plainly discernible."

"By Jove, you're right, Chief Watts!"

"The shape of the rubber leaves no room for doubt as to the wearer's sex," continued the chief. "It is too narrow for a man, and too long for a boy. The wearer was a woman."

"Look here, Chief Watts," cried Keene, pointing to the sill of the window. "There are the marks of her fingers in the dust. She rested her hands on the sill, evidently, while she peered out through the blinds. There is no doubt about these marks, surely. They were left here by the hand and fingers of a woman."

"It is as plain as the nose on your face," said Chief Watts, rising erect. "The woman stood here and watched for the coming and going of the policeman and watchman; and, probably by knocking with something on this bare floor, she warned her confederates to cease their operation until the officer had moved along on his beat. Meantime, she indulged in a lunch of chocolates. Upon my word, Keene, this is a curious case."

"May it not be possible, chief, that the woman was here previous to the burglary?" suggested Keene, with some misgivings. "That a woman was indeed identified with such a burglary seems more than strange."

Chief Watts immediately shook his head.

"No, no!" he replied, decisively. "The dampness here is from snow or ice, thawed from the woman's feet. It could not have been here yesterday, Detective Keene. Furthermore, the woman cannot have been here on any ordinary business this morning, for she certainly would not have stood here in the cold to have eaten a dozen squares of chocolate, and cast the wrappers about upon the floor. You may take my word for it, Keene, she watched here for two hours or more last night while the safe in the store below was being cracked."

"Well, chief," laughed Keene, "we have at least one clew to work from."

"Two," replied Chief Watts; "the woman and the chocolate. Let's look further."

A visit to the adjoining room, which was over the shoe store, and in the several vacant chambers on the floor above, revealed nothing in a way of further probable evidence, except a few burned matches on the floor of each.

"These fellows went about their work like old-timers," observed Chief Watts, with a glance at his companion. "They first came to these rooms to make sure they were vacant. These are the matches they lighted in order to look around. There is no doubt about it, nor that they were thoroughly familiar with the lay of the land. Come, we will return down-stairs."

They stepped into the bath-room on their way down. The water had not been turned off, the street connection serving both the tenement and the two stores below. In the

bath-room, also, they saw one of the square pieces of tinfoil; and the bowl of the lavatory was damp, and much stained with greasy black.

"Clever fellows, and very deliberate and self-possessed," dryly remarked Chief Watts, when he observed. "They even came back up here to cleanse their hands after the job was done."

"And the woman came in here to get a drink," laughed Keene, pointing to the tinfoil on the floor.

"No doubt of it," assented Chief Watts. "Chocolate makes one thirsty. I trust I shall have the pleasure of meeting this lady-burglar, who devoted the solitary hours of her weary vigil to eating chocolates. She must have quite as much sand as her male confederates. Keene!" added Chief Watts, with a quick glance at his companion's face, "here's a case that will test your cleverness!"

"I always welcome a mystery that brings all of one's reserve forces into play. There is then some credit in solving it."

"Well said!" nodded Chief Watts, approvingly. "There is nothing more to be learned about here, however, and the air is decidedly chilly. Let us return to the jewelry store. The landlord should have arrived by this time. We will see what information he can impart."

As Chief Watts had predicted, they found in the store, on their return, not only Mr. Kelcey, the landlord and part owner of the building, but also the private watchman of that particular district, and the senior partner of the firm, Mr. Kennedy.

In turn, Chief Watts immediately subjected the two former to a long and searching inquiry, which, however, added but little to the evidence already gathered.

The watchman stated that he had made his usual number of rounds during the previous night. He had tried the door of the jewelry store each time, and glanced in over the shutters, and he was sure the light near the safe had not been lowered. Yet he could not explain why he had failed to see that something was wrong.

The theory already advanced by Chief Inspector Watts was undoubtedly correct; and as the watchman bore a good reputation, he

was not arrested, his home address merely being taken.

Neither could Mr. Kelcey, the landlord, shed any light on the affair. During the previous month there had been a dozen or more callers at his office to inquire about the vacant tenement, the identity of most of whom he could by no means disclose. Of most of them he had not even asked their names.

"If they appeared to be respectable people," he explained to Chief Watts, "I readily allowed them to take the key and enter and examine the tenement, with the understanding that the key should be soon returned. Any of them, I now admit, might have made a duplicate key, or taken an impression for one, during the time I allowed them to have it."

"Has any person visited the tenement this morning?" the chief inquired.

"No, sir," Mr. Kelcey replied. "There has been no one in there since day before yesterday."

"When were you last through the rooms?"

"On that day, Chief Watts. I came around from my office with a lady and gentleman who wished to look at the rooms."

"Was the front room over this store in good order?"

"As you saw it, probably, since you say you have been there."

"I am not so sure of that," Chief Watts dryly rejoined. "Was there any papers or rubbish on the floor, when you were in the room day before yesterday?"

"No, sir; there was not. The room had been properly swept."

"And, so far as you can state, as a fact, there has been no person in there since day before yesterday, Mr. Kelcey?"

"Not to my knowledge?"

"And you have the only key to the tenement that you know of?"

"Yes, sir; I have the only one."

"Well, then, the room now needs the broom again," observed Chief Watts; this with a glance at Sheridan Keene. "It is very evident our deductions are pretty nearly correct."

"I think so, Chief Watts," nodded Keene, in his quiet way.

"Can you give me a description, Mr. Kel-

cey, of the lady and gentleman who last visited the tenement with you?"

"I know them well, sir; they are now occupying a house of mine on Bulfinch street, and have been thinking of making a change."

"Who was the applicant before them, do you remember?"

"A young man—a stranger to me, whose name I did not ask."

"How long ago did he call?"

"I think it was about five days ago."

"Did he visit the tenement?"

"He did. He went over it alone."

"Can you describe him?"

"Only in a general way, sir. I should say he was about thirty-five, of dark complexion, and appeared like a gentleman. I had no objection to allowing him to take the key."

"How long did he keep it?"

"For about an hour. When he returned it, he said he thought there might be more rooms than he should want, but that he, perhaps, would have his wife look the place over. He did not do so, however, and I have not seen him since. A day or two before he called, two elderly ladies visited the rooms, but decided adversely; and back of their application I cannot definitely remember."

This was all of consequence that could be learned of Mr. Kelcey, and he was allowed to depart. He first went over the tenement in person, however, and returned to assure Chief Watts that the burned matches and chocolate wrappers had certainly been dropped since his previous visit, two days before. Of that, however, both detectives were already satisfied.

Subsequent inquiries among night officers on the patrol in that locality were likewise futile. No suspicious person had been observed about there after midnight, and no officer could recall having seen a woman with one or more men upon the street after the storm fairly began. It had snowed lightly from about one o'clock until dawn, which fact, together with the evidence in the hall and front room of the tenement, established the interval during which the burglary must have been committed.

But at the end of two weeks, devoted to energetic investigation and active search, Chief Watts and the several detectives detailed

upon the case were forced to the conclusion that it did not much signify at what time the crime had been committed; for, of the much more important factors, the criminals themselves and the property stolen, not a trace could be found.

An inventory of the stolen property showed a large number of valuable watches, several packages of unset diamonds, many rings and jeweled ornaments, a number of solid gold chains, with divers other items. The thieves had selected their booty with an eye to value, portability and subsequent disposal, and the entire loss suffered by Messrs. Kennedy and Hicks ran close upon twenty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF A CLEW.

The official reports of his inspectors, relating to the robbery of Kennedy & Hicks, became less and less encouraging, as the days went by; and, one by one, the officers were withdrawn from the investigation, as it became necessary to detail them upon other important matters, until Detective Keene alone remained on the case. And even his reports had begun to show signs, if not of discouragement, at least of the utter futility of his efforts.

"I am blessed if I can find a clew that results in anything definite or reliable, Chief Watts," he said to the latter, one morning more than two weeks after the robbery had been committed. "I have kept constantly at work on the lines we laid out, and I am as much in the dark as on the morning we stood counting those pieces of tinfoil in Kelcey's tenement. The case is a very obscure one, chief; there is no doubt about that."

Chief Watts pushed back from his desk a few inches, and signed the detective to a chair.

"Have you visited all the confectioners, Detective Keene, and tried to locate a woman who frequently purchases chocolate in the form observed?" he asked, gravely.

"As to that, chief, I have left no stone unturned," Keene replied, taking the chair indicated.

"And with no result?"

"Absolutely none. I cannot get a trace of such a customer in any of the stores."

"Have you visited Baker's factory, where that particular brand is manufactured?"

"I have been there twice."

"How about the couple who visited the tenement two days previous to the robbery?"

"I can find nothing to warrant suspicion. Their visit appears to have been with genuine intentions, for they since have moved from Bulfinch street and taken a flat on Berkley street."

"Furthermore," added Keene, "I have learned that they were at the Columbia Theatre on the night of the robbery, and were lunching at nearly twelve o'clock. All that I can learn about them is in their favor."

"And the previous occupants of the tenement?"

"Both families are out of the case, in so far as having had a personal part in the job. I know where one and all of them were that night."

"The private watchman?"

"He still retains his position," said Keene, with a shake of his head. "All the men by whom he has been long employed vouch for his customary care and undoubted integrity."

"How about the pawnshops?"

"I cannot find one in which the stolen property has been offered as collateral. If any of it has been placed with a 'fence,' it has not been done in this city. By the way, chief, do you know if there is any professional cracksmen at present in this locality?"

"I have not been notified of any," Chief Watts replied. "Have you made any effort to locate the young man who had the tenement key about a week before the burglary, and who went over the place alone?"

"I have worked every string imaginable," Keene rejoined. "I even have advertised for the person, requesting a communication from him, hoping to end uncertainties in that direction."

"Have you received any reply to such an advertisement?"

"Not as yet."

"When was it inserted in the papers?"

"I have carried it in all the papers for a week. In display type, at that."

"It should have met the man's eye, then, if his location is still in this city," said Chief Watts, with more animation. "If he is all right, and his visit to the tenement was without evil designs, he certainly should have come forward in response to such an appeal."

"So it seems to me, chief."

"Keene, I think that fellow is the man we want!" exclaimed Chief Watts, drawing himself up in his chair. "You go to Kelcey, and get as precise a description of the stranger as the landlord can give you. If we cannot locate him from Kelcey's description, nor bring him out of obscurity with the help of the press, we'll try—— What is it, Garratt?"

The interruption was occasioned by the sudden appearance of the latter at the door of the chief's private office, and the expression on the clerk's face indicated that he had some message to impart. In response to the chief's look of inquiry, he explained, quickly:

"There is a woman out here, Chief Watts, who says she is very anxious to see you personally."

"What's her business?"

"She says she will state it only to you."

"What sort of a woman?"

"Evidently a lady."

"Let her come in," said Chief Watts, shortly.

Mr. Garratt went to bring the caller to the chief's private office, and the latter added, as Sheridan Keene rose to withdraw:

"Remain here, Keene; I am not yet through with you. This woman's business probably amounts to nothing important. I am determined that the Kennedy & Hicks burglars shall not evade discovery and arrest, if by any means we can——"

What he would have added was cut off by the entrance of the woman, and her appearance was rather calculated to negative the chief's disparaging comment upon her probable business. Such a woman as that who entered, was not likely to have invaded the police department without a mission which she, at least, considered important.

She was a very attractive woman, despite a certain look and air of embarrassment, natural under the circumstances, yet which was very soon dispelled; and her entrance into

the chief's private office was rather like that of a ray of sunshine.

She was about thirty, of medium height and good figure, the latter set off by a perfectly-fitting sealskin jacket, of fine fur and the latest style. Her face was oval, as pretty as a picture, and her rich, dark complexion had been given a rosier tint by the sharp air out of doors. Her eyes were vivaciously expressive, and as brilliant and sparkling as the clear white diamonds which adorned her pretty ears; while the smile with which she approached the chief's desk revealed through her red lips the edges of two rows of pearly white teeth.

"Are you Mr. Watts, the detective?" she asked, with conventional grace and fluency, as she pushed up her dainty black veil from her eyes and halted near the chief's desk. "I hope I don't find you engaged."

"I am Mr. Watts, and chief of the Boston inspectors," was the gravely courteous reply. "What can I do for you?"

"May I see you alone, sir?" she asked, at the same time with a quick, appreciative glance at Sheridan Keene, who had risen to give her his chair. "I hope you will not refuse me, Mr. Watts!"

The eager smile with which the last was said, and the indescribably fascinating personality of the young lady, brought a responsive smile to the grave face of the genial and urbane chief.

"If this gentleman, who is one of my inspectors, remains here, it will be about the same as seeing me alone, Miss——"

"Payson, sir. I am Mrs. Philip Payson."

"Mrs. Payson," bowed the chief, concluding his previous sentence. "If your business with me is of a nature requiring detective service, the work will devolve upon one of my officers, rather than upon myself. Hence, I prefer that you shall make any statement in the presence of Inspector Keene also, which, possibly, may save me the trouble of repeating it for his benefit after you have gone."

"Oh, yes, I see!" exclaimed Mrs. Payson, with a ripple of laughter, and a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "You merely tell your officers what to do, and they do it; is that it? Well, Mr. Watts, in that case I will submit to the third party."

Despite her fascinating manner, there was nothing flippant about this lady. That she was well-bred, cultured and intelligent, and a woman fitted by natural beauty, grace and accomplishments to move in refined society, was at once apparent in her easy vivaciousness and indescribable charm.

Despite himself, even Sheridan Keene felt the spell of the young woman's magnetism, and Chief Inspector Watts was inclined to laugh at the artless freedom of her remarks.

"Well, Mrs. Payson," he replied, smiling, "since you're willing to submit to a third party, I, at least, will hear of what your business consists. What is the trouble with you, that you are led to appeal to the police for aid?"

Mrs. Payson had taken the chair Keene had vacated, and now was removing a pair of seal mittens, an action which quickly displayed a pair of shapely white hands, adorned with numerous valuable rings. At the chief's question, a deeper color suddenly imbued her cheeks, yet she gave her head a semi-defiant toss, and exclaimed, while her bright eyes flashed sharply at those of her questioner:

"Trouble enough, Mr. Watts! But the trouble is not with me, sir; it is with my husband."

"And what is the trouble with your husband, Mrs. Payson?"

"That is the very question I wish you to answer for me, Mr. Watts," she cried, with her vivacity now imbued with genuine earnestness. "I am mystified—thoroughly and completely mystified. I cannot account for his conduct, and I must have some one to help me discover the truth. Really, Mr. Watts, I cannot sleep nights!"

"Well, that's a shame," dryly observed the chief, with a smile; and he now began to suspect the nature of his caller's business. "But my good woman," he added, gravely, "I think you will have to appeal to a private detective. We do not undertake looking after the recreant husbands of jealous and fascinating young wives, if that is the service you desire?"

"Oh, but I am not jealous, Mr. Watts," said Mrs. Payson, blushing and laughing. "Far from it! I am distressed only because I cannot account for my husband's conduct."

Jealous! indeed not! Phil is a perfect jewel of a husband, in all ways but one. He won't tell me where he goes nights. He just laughs at my questions, and calls me his perfect little darling, and tells me it's none of my business and not to bother my dear little head about it, and so keeps me in constant darkness."

"But, Mrs. Payson——"

"Oh, please, Mr. Watts! Now don't drive me away! You know, as well as I do, that a man in the advertising business should have no occasion to be away from home three or four nights in a week. And, too, Phil comes home at such utterly inconsistent hours, and tells such absurd stories about where he has been. The idea of a man's coming home at three or four in the morning, and telling one he has just come from Lynn, or Haverhill, or some other old place, from which no train arrives at any such hour! Really, Mr. Watts, I cannot stand it any longer—and I won't! You have got to help me out. Now, Mr. Watts, please don't say you'll do nothing of the kind, for your face certainly looks it!"

And this vivaciously determined young wife leaned forward and laid both her hands on those of the chief, with such a display of charm and appeal, that even the man addressed was for a moment captivated.

"But, Mrs. Payson," he protested, gravely, "we cannot undertake such a case as this. A private detective——"

"But I'll not have a private detective investigating my Phil; that's out of the question. I know the best detectives are all on the regular force, and the best is not any too good for me, and I'm ready to pay his price. Now, Mr. Watts, you'll not refuse; I know you'll not. You look so grave, even while your officer there is laughing at us; but there is something in your eyes that says you'll consider my request. It's not an ordinary case, Mr. Watts, if you'll only hear the particulars; and I am sure you will. If money is an object——"

"One moment, please," interposed Chief Watts, who really found himself quite cornered by the lady. "Who is your husband?"

"Ah, now you are leaning my way, aren't you? How awfully good of you! My husband; he's Philip Payson, sir, and just the

dearest fellow in the world—all but one thing! He conceals——"

"Please answer my questions concisely, Mrs. Payson, if you wish me to listen to you any longer," the chief again interposed, now with some austerity. "What is your husband's business?"

"He is in the advertising business, sir, and sees to putting signs in cars, and on fences, and all that sort of thing," explained Mrs. Payson, volubly, and without giving the slightest attention to the chief's austerity.

"Where is his office?"

"In the Arcade building, on Washington street."

"And where do you live?"

"We keep house on Hereford street."

"Is your husband a man of means?"

Mrs. Payson's lovely face took on an expression absurdly demure and dismal, but her eyes never for an instant lost their fascinating brilliancy. She drew herself up with a little sigh, and exclaimed:

"Dear me, Mr. Watts, I don't know! At times I think he is, and at times I think he isn't! Phil's awfully funny about money matters."

"In what way?"

"Oh, he gives me all that heart can wish—money, rings, diamonds, and no end of nice clothes—and you'd think he had money to burn, as the rather inelegant saying goes. Then, again, I have known him to take half of my jewelry at a time, and carry it away for a month—sometimes longer."

"Does he offer no explanation for so doing?"

"Oh, much the same kind that he offer for his absence nights. He says he borrows money on the stones—temporarily, you know! Investments, coppers, something in stocks—really, I don't know what! Then, again, he suddenly turns up with no end of money, and brings all the jewelry home."

"And when you ask him to explain such curious conduct, what does he say?" asked Chief Watts, in whose grave blue eyes there had risen a rather strange expression of augmented interest.

"Oh, he merely laughs, and tells me not to bother my dear little heart and head," replied Mrs. Payson; then, with a touch of infinite

sadness, she quickly added: "But my dear little head has a great trouble in it, and my dear little heart has a ceaseless ache; and, oh, Mr. Watts, that's why I have come here to ask your assistance!"

"How old is your husband, Mrs. Payson?"

"He is nearly thirty-eight."

"About medium height and build?"

"Just about, sir."

"Light or dark?"

"He is dark, like myself, sir; and much better looking!" added Mrs. Payson, with a pretty blush. "He is awfully good, in his way; and awfully—ah, no! I will not believe he is awfully bad!"

"But why do you fear he is bad at all, Mrs. Payson?"

Her eyes took on an expression which neither officer yet had seen.

"Why should a husband deceive his wife?" she rejoined, in a low, distressed whisper. "Should it be for good? Ah, Mr. Watts, I am a woman of character. My connections are honorable people, who stand high in society. I have not been accustomed to such misgivings as these by which I now am burdened. I cannot longer endure the shadow of evil which has forced its way into my life, and I must have it dispelled by a revelation of the whole truth, let the worst be what it may. Can you understand these sentiments, Mr. Watts? If so, you now know why I have come here."

There was something very touching in the way all this was said. Unconsciously, this woman had shed a new light over herself and her mission. She was not, after all, that common type of a jealous wife, who seeks to detect her husband in some culpable escapade.

She rather was a woman so strong in her own lofty character that, with possibly an equally lofty purpose in view, she sought to know even the truth she had grown to fear, and which a husband who, evidently, was most dear to her, was artfully, yet strenuously, withholding.

Chief Watts looked up, and now observed in the grave eyes of Sheridan Keene a reflection of the same suspicion that had risen in his own mind. He arose, with a word of

apology to the woman, and drew the detective aside.

"There is the shadow of a clew here, Keene," he said, softly.

"The same idea has occurred to me, chief," was the whispered reply. "It is barely possible that her husband is the man for whom we are looking."

"Yet do not needlessly alarm her," suggested Chief Watts, with manly consideration. "I hardly needed to caution you, however, in that respect. It seems a shame to break the heart of such a woman as this; but duty is duty, and justice must be served at whatever cost. I have an engagement to meet Lawson at the Merchants' National Bank at ten o'clock, and must go at once. I will leave the woman to you, and the investigation."

"Very well, chief."

"Follow up the thread in your own way, and report to me a little later."

CHAPTER IV.

FOLLOWING THE THREAD.

Chief Watts briefly explained to Mrs. Payson the occasion for his departure, and informed her that Detective Keene would further consider her case, and perhaps investigate it. The latter detained her only briefly in the chief's private office in order to learn if other habits of her husband sustained the suspicion formed.

That the description she had given Keene of Philip Payson corresponded with that of the applicant described by Kelcey, and that Payson was certainly carrying sail in an uncommon way, had led to interest displayed by Chief Watts, and to the deductions made by both detectives. In the utter absence of a more promising clew, Keene felt this one, at least, to be worth investigating, little dreaming to what startling incidents and disclosures it was speedily to lead.

"Are there any regular nights, Mrs. Payson, when your husband remains away from home?" asked Keene, sitting on the arm of the chief's chair while he made his few inquiries.

"There is nothing at all regular about him, Mr. Keene," was the reply. "I never know

when he is going to be away. He is seldom absent two consecutive nights, however; and a night off is invariably followed by a day passed almost entirely in bed. He claims that traveling tires him; but, ah, sir, I know there is something more than that, and that no man in a legitimate business can neglect it day after day."

"Has Mr. Payson been absent any night this week?"

"Monday, only, sir."

"And to-day is Thursday. How about last week?"

"He was away two entire nights, and one until nearly four in the morning."

"Can you remember if he was away two weeks ago last Tuesday night?"

"He was away till nearly morning, sir," replied Mrs. Payson, after brief thought. "I remember it distinctly now, because it snowed that night, and I scolded him not only for remaining away, but also for tracking the snow through the hall. We had just laid a new carpet."

"Did he say why he had been absent?"

"Only in his evasive way, sir; and he seemed so unusually tired and cross when I questioned him that I let the subject drop. Next day he gave me this diamond ring, and permission to buy the sack I am wearing."

"I assume, then," Keene observed, quietly, "that at present your husband is flush with money?"

"He appears to be, sir."

"Mrs. Payson," and Keene's voice fell a trifle, "why are you so determined to know the truth about your husband?"

"Because, sir," and she looked up at him with a quick flash of her dark eyes, "if Philip Payson is doing wrong in any way, it is my duty as a wife to know it, and to endeavor to reform him, both for his own sake and mine. That alone is why."

Keene rose from the chair and signed for the woman to accompany him.

"I will look into the case," he said, while they stood in the floor; "but I shall require that you take no further action in this direction until you have heard from me."

"I will readily accede to that condition, sir," Mrs. Payson said, quickly.

"And you must say nothing to your hus-

band that will lead him to suspect that his movements are being watched."

"Indeed, I will not."

"Give me the number of your house on Hereford street, then, and I will report to you as soon as I make any discoveries warranting it. This is your card; very well. No, there are no charges."

Checking the expressions of gratitude with which Mrs. Payson would have responded, Sheridan Keene accompanied her to the outer door, and there bade her good-morning. He did not return to the chief's office, but, after carefully considering the situation, and deciding upon the best course to pursue, he left the headquarters building and started for the office of Mr. Kelcey, the landlord of the tenement.

He could easily have Kelcey visit Payson's office, he decided, and report if the latter was the young man who had the key to the tenement a week before the burglary was committed, and whose identity it was so difficult to establish.

On arriving at the broker's office, however, Keene found this project nipped in the bud. Kelcey had left town a day before to look after business in Chicago, and was not expected home for two weeks or more. The tenement had not been let, the detective was informed by a young lady in charge of the office, nor had any young man called with his wife concerning it.

Keene now changed his plans. To shadow Payson would be an easy matter, but it might result in nothing for a long interval, and the vague possibility that he was concerned in the robbery did not seem to warrant this delay and caution. Keene determined to visit the man in person.

He stopped for lunch downtown, and shortly after one o'clock entered the Arcade building, one of the older massive stone structures on Washington street. Tabulated on the wall of one side the entrance was a list of the tenants, with Philip Payson as the occupant of No. 47. The room was on the fourth floor, and the detective took the elevator, he being the only passenger.

"Do you know whether Mr. Payson is now in his office?" he asked of the boy in charge.

"Yes, sir; he is," was the reply. "He went up with me about five minutes ago."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose he is quite busy, isn't he?" Keene carelessly remarked.

"Well, I don't know about that, sir," replied the lad. "He's here only about half the time—room 47, sir, left."

Keene nodded as he left the car, and approached the last of the several offices in the direction mentioned. It was near a corner of the building, and on the pane of ground glass in the door was the number of the office and the sign, "Philip Payson, Advertising Agent."

"Looks like a legitimate business," thought Keene, as he laid his hand on the knob.

Contrary to his expectations, the door was locked. He knocked twice, but received no answer; then he gave the lower panel several sharp blows with his foot. It brought no response except from the adjoining office, from which an elderly man now emerged, without hat or coat.

"Looking for Mr. Payson?" he asked, surveying Keene with rather a curious stare.

"Yes," replied the detective. "I was told he was in his office."

"If he is, your noise certainly would have aroused him," dryly observed the other. "He came up with me in the elevator a few minutes ago, and I saw him enter his office. He probably has gone out again."

"Like enough," nodded Keene. "I will call again."

The incident seemed casual enough, yet he did not quite fancy it. He walked back to the elevator and rang it up, when he again accosted the boy.

"Are you quite sure that Payson has not gone down with you during the past five minutes?" asked Keene.

"Yes, sir; I am sure," was the lad's reply. "Isn't he in his office?"

"I can't raise him. I want to see him about some advertising."

"Well, he has not gone down with me since I told you he came in," said the boy. "He may have gone down the stairs. Are you going down, sir?"

"Not yet."

The elevator call had sounded from below, and the lad slammed the grated door, much as if he resented being summoned up four flights to reply to such trivial questions. Keene walked down one of the flights of stairs which wound about the elevator well, and in the corridor below he found a woman sweeping.

"How long have you been at work here, my good woman?" he asked.

"Sure, sir, a quarter-hour good and strong," she replied, resting on her broom.

"Have you noticed a dark-complexioned young man come down these stairs?"

"Devil a man or woman has come down them stairs, sir, dark or light," declared the woman, with true Celtic emphasis. "I am just after swapping 'em."

"You are quite sure, then?"

"Bedad, I am! So you are after losing a man?"

"Yes, in a way," replied Keene, evasively.

"Faith, sir, he might have gone down the back stairs, though, them's not used much," suggested the woman, as if struck with an idea.

"Where are the back stairs?"

"Come along with me now, and I'll show you."

Ordinarily the incidental disappearance of a man in this way would have occasioned Keene no serious misgivings. With his present distrust of Payson, however, the circumstance appealed to him with irrepressible significance.

The back stairs to which he was led were in a narrow passage adjoining several of the rear offices of each floor, and was a way evidently used chiefly for the removal of rubbish from the building. They led down to a narrow paved court, which entered from one of the side streets. The several offices mentioned had access to this way of exit by rear doors, but the way was one no tenant would have used under ordinary circumstances, and never the general public.

"Can I go down to the street by these stairs?" asked Keene, on whom the situation was now making a decided impression.

"Sure, you can," the woman replied. "But it's not very clane, sir."

"I will chance the dirt," Keene rejoined.

as he started through the passage and down the stairs.

In the court below he found three men at work with a dump-cart, removing ashes. A glance told him that they had been at work there a full half-hour. Of one of them Keene immediately inquired:

"Did you see the gentleman who came out this way a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir, I did," replied the workman, taking the opportunity to rest on his shovel. "He went to the street not more than two minutes ago."

"Ah, then I missed him," added Keene, and he returned to the narrow entry.

Climbing four of the dusty flights of stairs, he now made a tour of investigation, and finally succeeded in locating the rear door of Payson's office. An examination of the knobs of the two adjoining doors revealed that they were thick with dust, the doors seldom being opened. The knob of Payson's door, however, was entirely free from dust. It was plain that this way of exit was used frequently.

Satisfied that Payson was not in his office, the detective dropped to his knee and peered through the keyhole. The key had been removed, and by looking straight across the room he could see that the key of the opposite door was also gone.

"I must get in here," he decided. "And there's no time like the present."

Fishing out a ring of keys from his pocket, the detective tried several and finally found one that would shoot the bolt. Then he entered the office and set the door ajar, that he might hear the step of any person approaching.

The office was cheaply furnished. An oak desk occupied a position near the window. There were two wooden chairs and a table which looked down to the court below. In one corner, and a set of shelves filled with newspapers. There was a mirror on the wall, with a brush and comb in the tray beneath it.

Keene first opened the door of a small closet in one corner, to make sure no person was concealed there, the circumstances seeming to warrant even this suspicion. Instead of a person, he found hanging to pegs

on the wall a wardrobe that rather surprised him. It consisted of a heavy brown kersey overcoat, nearly new; two suits of clothes, one of fine texture and a dainty dark plaid; the other a coarse woolen, considerably worn, and impregnated with the odor of tobacco smoke. On a nail at one side hung a figured linen shirt, nicely laundered, and a standing white collar, with a rich silk tie.

"He has been here and changed his clothes," Keene quickly decided. "He is using this office as a blind. There is no doubt in my mind now, Mr. Payson, but that you need looking after."

Closing the closet door, Keene now examined the desk. On top were several open letters, relating to advertising, which indicated a legitimate business. The drawers of the desk were unlocked, with the exception of the lower one. The former contained only bill-heads, envelopes and paper, and such articles as one might have expected to find.

Finding he had no key with which he could open the lower drawer, Keene drew out the drawer above it. As he had thought, there was no fixed partition between the two, and he now could thrust his arm into the lower one.

It occasioned him less surprise than if he was not in a measure prepared for some such discovery. The drawer contained a loaded revolver, and wig of dark reddish hue, much worn; a false mustache, of the best French make, and several sticks of grease-paint.

"A disguise, eh?" muttered Keene, surveying the several articles in turn. "Mr. Payson has evidently been playing a double game. I wonder if he has a lady friend who is fond of chocolate. Yet not his wife, surely!"

Tossed carelessly into this drawer was a letter, which Detective Keene next fished out and proceeded to examine.

It had been posted at the Back Bay sub-station the previous evening, and it was addressed to Mr. Lipton Page, for general delivery at the main office. Written in a

coarse, flowing hand on the sheet inclosed was the following:

"Jan. 12th, 1900.

"MR. L. PAGE:

"What do you take me for—a jay? If I am not let into the game, I'll blow the whole business to the police. And this goes, too! Do you think I am to be frozen out because a cat has squealed? Not if I know it! I'll see you at two to-morrow. Don't give me any frozen hand, or the game will be up for you as well as for me. Don't think this is a bluff, for it all goes, or my name is not
"DARBY MCGEE."

Sheridan Keene smiled faintly as he read this significant missive. Then he made on one of Payson's billheads a copy of it. This having been done, he replaced these evidences of Philip Payson's double game where he had found them, and departed from the office by the way he had come.

CHAPTER V.

A DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE.

In the light of the evidence discovered, Keene drew the quite natural conclusion that he had run upon a well-organized gang of thieves and burglars, the head and front of which was probably the man who was playing a double game, as a legitimate advertising solicitor and the director of a gang of designing burglars.

The letter found in Payson's desk indicated that one of these, by the name of McGee, evidently had incurred general displeasure, and was threatened with being excluded from this organization of malefactors. Its date, the hour it must have been received by Page, which appeared to be an alias concealing Payson's true identity from his confederates, and its threatening contents, and the appointment made for two o'clock, easily explained Payson's hurried departure from his office at just before that hour:

Keene decided that Payson had been alarmed on receipt of the letter, and had hurried to his office, there changing his clothes and effecting a disguise, and thence had hastened to an habitual rendezvous, to which McGee had intimated he should come at two o'clock. As the threatened exposure was not made to the police that day, it

could only be assumed that the discord had been adjusted, and McGee pacified.

When Chief Watts received Keene's report that evening, he at once laid out a line of work to be followed.

"Since we now have him under our eye, it will not be well to arrest Payson on uncertainties," he said, decidedly. "If the facts are what the evidence indicates, there is more to be accomplished than the arrest of this man alone. His confederates also must be taken, and the property stolen from Kennedy & Hicks recovered, if possible. To-morrow you had better visit Payson, and take his measure. You say the directory doesn't contain his name?"

"Neither his, nor McGee's," Keene rejoined.

"They probably are strangers here, then, and are making this a point to work from," continued the chief. "In that case your features are not likely to be known, and a visit will not give Payson any alarm. Invent some casual ground for your call, and see what the man is like."

"That may be easily done."

"I'll leave the details to you. Watch out that he doesn't fool you."

Keene smiled significantly, but made no reply to this caution.

He called twice at Payson's office next day, but not until a third attempt, nearly at noon, did he find the man he was seeking. On opening the door, he discovered Payson at his desk, engaged in writing a letter, and the detective did not behold quite the type of man he had expected.

For Payson was as clean-cut and attractive a man as one often meets. He was about medium height, with a figure at once compact and graceful. His face was smoothly shaven, his features regular, with dark eyes, a pleasing mouth, and a rounded chin. His hair was cut noticeably short, but his head was shapely and well poised, and there was absolutely nothing in the face of the man to suggest the criminal.

Yet the instant Keene came over the threshold, the color in Payson's cheeks gave place to momentary pallor. He rose quickly from his chair, smiled faintly, and said with a voice as mellow as that of a woman:

"Good-morning, Detective Keene."

Keene's immobile face had not changed by so much as a shadow, yet the change in that of Payson had instantly told him he was recognized.

"Good-morning," he nodded, pleasantly. "Are you Mr. Payson?"

"Yes, sir, I am," was the ready reply. "Take a chair."

"For a few moments only," Keene replied. "I shall not detain you long."

Payson laughed in a soft, genial way.

"You'll not detain me," he replied, squarely meeting the detective's eyes. "I am not a very busy man. What can I do for you, Detective Keene?"

"How do you happen to know me by sight and name, Mr. Payson?" asked the detective, smiling.

"You were pointed out to me once in the street, and I never forget a face," Payson glibly explained. "Particularly when it is a striking and forceful one."

Keene's smile became a laugh. The attitude Payson was taking was that of a man already prepared to meet any ordinary move by the detective service, and Keene accordingly made no such move. He, in turn, at once resorted to strategy and cunning.

"You are complimentary," he rejoined, in his pleasant way. "I have called on a matter of business only. I have a young cousin out Avon way who is engaged in soap making, with a formula of his own. I have received a letter from him asking me to ascertain in what way he can advertise the cheapest, with the best results. He hasn't much money, understand; but he wants to waste what he has in advertising."

Payson responded with a low, ringing laugh, which somehow had a genuine resonance.

"Waste it in advertising, eh?" he cried, looking Keene squarely in the face. "If all men thought as you speak, Detective Keene, what would become of poor devils like Philip Payson? I guess we'd have to hoe in another row. Ah, well, perhaps your bark is worse than your bite! I will at least give you the benefit of the doubt, and do what I can to serve you. Here, by the way, is a

letter I just received from a party who can speak more highly of my method of advertising."

And Philip Payson, with the abandon of one without fear or suspicion, tossed over a genuine letter for the detective to read.

"And now, Inspector Keene," he added, genially; "I'll do whatever you say. I'll answer your cousin's letter myself, and give him the benefit of my experience; or I'll give you a few points about advertising, and you can answer it. Which shall it be?"

"As I expect him in town to dine with me next Sunday, perhaps you had better talk them over with me," said Keene.

He had no idea of giving up the letter he had prepared solely for a blind, yet which was now acting rather like a boomerang. He had no resource but to maintain his duplicity to the finish, and for a half-hour he sat and listened to the suggestions and advice of Payson, not a little perplexed by his evident knowledge of the business, and by the significance of the testimonials he took pains to produce.

Nor could he do less than thank him when he made his departure, remarking that he would return with his cousin's decision the first of the week.

The door scarce had closed, before Payson underwent a startling change.

"Cousin be ——! He was dealing seconds!" he fiercely muttered, under his breath. "He has tumbled to something! Has he run down the game? Has McGee peached? Does he suspect that I am back of the game, and that I—by heaven! the stuff must be removed at once! at once!"

As if time was too valuable for such thoughts as these, even, he suddenly sprang to the door and turned the key. Then he darted to the closet and began stripping off his clothes. He was very pale. His eyes burned with abnormal brilliancy. He was tremulous with haste and excitement.

Yet despite all this, his every movement was made with extraordinary precision and lightning-like rapidity, which displayed at once the natural dexterity of the man, and his wonderful concentrative faculty. It took him less than five minutes to effect his

changes of attire and aspect. Then he darted to the rear door of the room, listening intently for a moment for the sound of any step outside, and again repeating in his low, quick, forceful way.

"The stuff must be removed at once! Who in thunder has set Sheridan Keene after me? Can McGee have blowed the whole game—or his she-devil of a wife? It pours when it rains they say. Let it pour! If I am not all in the wrong, I'll yet fool Mr. Sheridan Keene."

With a tread as quick and light as that of a cat, he darted across the room and removed the key from the front door, then let himself out by the back, locking the latter behind him. Then he hastened down the several stairways of the dim and dusty back way, and emerged into the rear court.

But this man who was thus seeking the city streets did not resemble the erect, stylish, clean-cut man in the brown kersey, who had entered Payson's office an hour earlier.

This fellow was a man in a rough tweed coat, a wooly sack suit, baggy at the knees, and a flannel shirt in place of fancy figured linen. He was a fellow with a stoop of the shoulders, a droop in the poise of his head, a shock of reddish-brown hair, a lowered brow and less honest and open eyes, and a mouth veiled by a moustache which completely hid its pleasing regularity.

This was the man who emerged from the rear of the Arcade building early that afternoon, with his furtive glances, searching every doorway, corner, and possible concealment, for a spy upon his movements. He could not guess what had occurred in his office the previous day, as he imagined that his cleverness was as great as the detective art of the man he now aimed to evade.

Yet when he emerged from the court, and presently started off at a swinging, half-shambling gait up Devonshire street, Sheridan Keene, in a dark beard and steel-bowed glasses, was scarcely thirty feet behind him.

When alleviating the apprehension Mr. Philip Payson had inadvertently betrayed, on beholding Detective Keene enter his office, the latter had been thoroughly satisfied that, after his departure, Mr. Lipton

Page would speedily emerge from the rear door.

This was the art and cunning of Sheridan Keene.

CHAPTER VI.

SHERIDAN KEENE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

The criminal and the detective, the pursued and the pursuer, might have been attached by some invisible thread, so perfectly adjusted were the movements of the latter to those of the former. For skill in shadowing a man, and evading not only his observation, but that of the third party, even, Sheridan Keene was without a peer in his profession.

Yet not once did Payson look back. Had he not felt sure of himself at the start, he never would have started. He did not dream that Detective Keene had previously discovered his double game, and from that moment was scarce less close to him than his own shadow.

Payson shaped a course through Devonshire street and Winthrop square, then headed as straight for Harrison avenue as the crooked streets of Boston would permit. That his destination was some rendezvous of his confederates Keene now felt comparatively certain. To locate this probable dive was now of paramount importance.

At the corner of Beach street, Payson suddenly halted, his gaze bent on a man emerging from a saloon across the new, broad square which merges into Harrison avenue.

Detective Keene stopped also and asked a man at his elbow the way to the Union Station.

But even now Philip Payson had not turned back. He for a moment watched the man who had taken his attention, then suddenly started across the square, and presently called him by name.

"McGee! Hold up a bit, Darby!"

McGee turned quickly, and the two men met on the curbing, where they remained standing in a subdued yet earnest discussion.

Sheridan Keene turned his collar about his neck, muffling even more his disguised features, and sauntered around by the crossings to stare into a near window; yet he could

overhear only parts of what passed between the two men.

McGee was a flashily-dressed man of forty, with a good figure and dark features. His eyes had a coldly-determined expression, his nostrils a mettlesome curl, his jaw was square and rigid, his lips thin and firm. He looked like a man of indomitable will and desperate courage, when the occasion should require.

He wheeled sharply on hearing his name, and quickly responded, with a smile of greeting.

"Hello, Lippie Page! What d'ye know?"

Page quickly joined him crying under his breath with some display of subdued anger:

"It's what I don't know that crosses me! Look here, Darby, have you tipped off the game?"

"Tipped off nothing!" exclaimed McGee, with a quick start and a frown. "Of course I haven't."

"You're sure of that?" demanded Payson, with vehemence.

"If you imply again that I am not, you'll invite me to wring your neck," McGee now answered, resentfully. "Why should I blow the game? Didn't you fix things yesterday? Since I am not to be frozen out, it is not like me to give the thing away."

"Then your wife must have," growled Payson.

"Not by a long chalk! If she has, it will be her neck instead of yours."

"But you told me of her threats."

"And I told you she'd not execute them," protested McGee. "She knows well enough I'd cut her tongue out, if she did. Don't imagine she holds ribbons over me! No, no, she'll not make a break, my word for it. What's gone wrong with you, though?"

"I suspect that the police are on to our game."

"Come off!"

"I've good reason to fear it," rejoined Payson, with an ominous shake of his head. "I cannot wait to tell you why."

"Where are you going?"

"Up to the joint. The stuff must be got away and put under cover. I'll take no chances of a search-warrant."

"Who has tipped you off?"

"I have had no tip, but I know Detective Keene is after me on some kind of a lay."

"The devil you say!"

"Oh, I know what I am about, Darby," proceeded Payson, with a succession of emphatic nods. "I'll give him no chance to split me on a case. If he comes, he shall find nothing. I must head off any meeting of the gang to-night."

"Then there'll surely be nothing doing to-night?"

"I should say not! I tell you I will take no chances with him in the ring. If Keene were to nail the gang in the attempt, the jig would be up in this locality from that moment."

"That's true enough," McGee admitted. "If I see Skillings, I will warn him to keep away and lay low."

"Do so! He's the best known to the police."

"I will make it a point to see him. Are you off?"

"I dare not delay here too long," nodded Payson. "The stuff must be got under cover. This Keene is a wicked man to have at our heels. He's likely to set his teeth when you least expect it. I'll be ready for him before night, and then he may do what he likes. I fooled them from soda to hock, thus far, and I'll beat him along with the rest."

"Hold on," cried McGee, as Payson turned to go. "When shall we meet again, in case you are off on this?"

"I will know in a day or two," Payson lingered to reply. "I must be dead sure our game is not suspected."

"If there are no changes, mind, I am not to be frozen out!" growled McGee, with a threatening light in his coldly-determined eyes. "If I am, I will make good what I said, and blow the whole business. I am as good a man in this as any of the party, and you'd ought to know it."

For a moment Payson looked the speaker in the face, his own grimly doubtful.

"You are all right in some ways, Darby," he finally rejoined. "I am not inclined to throw you down, but there are things you don't want to forget. While you are not well known about Boston, your face is pictured in quarters not pleasant to think about."

No, I will not freeze you out; yet I don't quite fancy what you've been playing in of late."

He was speaking with a significance that brought an angry look to McGee's stern face.

"What's that to you or any other, so be it I know my business?" he demanded, resentfully.

"You know as well as I do," returned Payson. "But enough of that for now. I will let you know when we are to meet again."

"See that you do!" McGee pointedly answered, as the two men parted.

Darby McGee hurried away in the direction of Beach street; while Payson, swinging on in a half-shambling fashion he was feigning, hastened up Harrison avenue.

Sheridan Keene, who had overheard parts of what had been said, and who now felt that he had the case well in hand, continued to shadow the man whom he believed to be the head of an organized gang, at whose door could be laid the robbery of Kennedy & Hicks. With the location of their headquarters, he believed that the arrest and conviction of the gang would be easy. Payson held his pace for a half mile or more, then turned sharply into one of the side streets making through to Washington street.

Keene, meantime, had crossed to the opposite side of Harrison avenue, in anticipation of some such divergence on the part of the man he shadowed, and he almost immediately had the side street in view.

It was a wise precaution. For suddenly Payson vanished from the street, and disappeared into a basement doorway, with a celerity that would have baffled the majority of men.

But Keene had the house in his eye, and without approaching it he reckoned the number from that of the one on the corner. Then he waited until a patrolman came through Harrison avenue on his beat. Calling him nearer, Keene made himself known and asked:

"Do you know, Golden, who occupies number thirteen on this street? It's the house with blinds closed on the second floor."

The officer shook his head.

"I don't, inspector," he replied. "That house was vacant a month ago, and I have not heard who has taken it."

"Do you see any persons going and coming from it?"

"I very seldom see any one, sir. It's a little off my regular beat, you know, and I have noticed nothing out of the way. Do you suspect anything wrong, sir?"

"I know there is something wrong," said Keene, decisively; "but I am not yet satisfied what."

"I'll keep an eye on the house, if you say so, sir."

"I wish you to do so, only briefly. Just long enough for me to run down to headquarters, and send a special to shadow the place. I will send him to you, after which you will resume your regular duties."

"Very well, sir."

"Take heed that you are not observed watching the house, and don't chance walking by it. I shall go around to Washington street, also, and station an officer at the further corner. Has the house a rear exit?"

"Only into the back yard, sir, with no way to the street," explained the officer. "The entrance to the basement floor is under the front steps."

"Ah, I see," nodded Keene, now appreciating how Payson disappeared so quickly.

"Any other directions, sir?"

"These only," replied the detective. "Do not interfere with any person who may come out of the house, unless it should be a man or woman with a bundle, or package of some kind. In that case make an arrest somewhere away from the house, and take the party to the station. I will have an inspector here to relieve you within an hour."

The patrolman started to touch his helmet to Keene, but the detective interposed, quickly:

"Don't do that, Golden! Do I look like an inspector of police? Who knows what eyes may be watching. You say that is Dover street yonder? And South Boston lies in the direction I am pointing. Thank you, officer; I think I now can find my way."

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE OF PLAN.

Having informed and stationed an officer at the Washington street corner, thereby preventing the escape of any person from the suspected house, Sheridan Keene hailed a cab and was driven rapidly to headquarters, where he made to Chief Inspector Watts a report of his discoveries, covering all the details.

Meanwhile two inspectors were sent to relieve the patrolman; and immediately upon hearing Keene's report, Chief Watts determined to make an aggressive move.

"We will raid the place at once, Keene," he said, decisively.

"That's my idea, Chief Watts!" exclaimed Keene, eagerly.

"It can be done before dark," continued the chief, "after which Payson might possibly succeed in slipping out, and removing some of the stuff he is so anxious to get under cover. If the property resulting from the operations of this gang is still in the house, as Payson's words and conduct indicates, we will succeed in locating it."

"Easily, chief; and it certainly is now in the house. I know that from what I heard Payson say to McGee."

"You did not recognize McGee as an old offender, did you?"

"No, sir; he was a stranger to me. But I did not fancy his looks."

"We probably can reach him later, even if we quietly arrest all hands discovered in the house."

"No doubt of that, chief! Furthermore, there were others coming there to-night, whom Payson seemed anxious to warn to keep away. If we take all hands in custody, these others should put in an appearance as expected."

"In which case we will be ready to receive them," nodded Chief Watts, rising and taking his hat. "I want just a few words with Superintendent Eldridge, and then I will go with you in person. Four of us will be sufficient."

Following Chief Watts through the corridor, Sheridan Keene mounted the steps leading into Pemberton square, intending to

wait on the sidewalk until the chief rejoined him.

The winter afternoon was drawing to a close; it wanted less than half an hour to the fall of dusk. The last beams of the declining sun were tingeing with golden light the tops of the loftier buildings, the shadows of which lay darker in contrast across the streets and squares.

It was the hour of day when people were beginning to hasten homeward. The morning loiterers about the court-house had gone their way long before; the civil sessions had adjourned, and judges, lawyers and clients retired until the morrow. Pemberton square seemed comparatively deserted.

A minute or more passed, and the chief did not return.

Then an incident occurred which, by its very simplicity, shows of what stuff true detectives are made; and how strangely a man of Keene's cleverness, even, may be misled by conflicting combinations of circumstances, as well as how quickly the error can be dropped, and the true and startling adjustment of relations be instinctively grasped and turned to effective use.

While Keene stood waiting, a woman abruptly started from the opposite side of the square and quickly approached him. He was so intent in thought, that he did not observe her until she drew near, and evidently was about to address him.

Then he saw that she was a woman of thirty, rather showily dressed, with diamonds in her ears, and an emerald brooch at her throat, her cloak being partly open. She was not pretty, and in no way resembled Mrs. Philip Payson, although the incident suggested the latter.

Her features were sharp, her brow narrow, her nose *retroussé*, her eyes yellowish gray, with a subtle gleam of malice or selfishness in their unpleasant depths. Her lips, too, were noticeably thin and severe, and were soiled just the least bit at each corner of her mouth, as if she had been eating caramels—or chocolate!

She at once addressed Keene, asking in a quick, decisive way, which was suggestive of subdued asperity :

"Can you tell me which of these doors I

must enter, in order to find the chief of police?"

Sheridan Keene bowed slightly, then threw back his coat and displayed his badge.

"I am an inspector of police, madam," he replied, pleasantly, yet with some decision. "The chief is busy this afternoon, and cannot receive you. What is your business? Perhaps I can help you."

The woman impatiently tapped the sidewalk with her foot, then made up her mind to answer.

"I want to take steps," she said, with more manifest bitterness, "to have my husband prevented from gambling!"

"Gambling!" echoed Keene, without a change of countenance, though his blood started quickly. "How do you know he gambles?"

"Oh, I know it well enough!" the woman cried, with resentful acerbity. "He never does much else, when he has the price of a stack of checks. I'll stand for it no longer, husband or no husband! And I've told him so, and that I'd squeal if he didn't stop it. Now, I want the place closed, in which he spends night after night!"

To a man of Keene's experience, the woman's language was a betrayal of her character and her associates. With no apparent interest in her, more than what her appeal might have aroused, Keene asked, quietly:

"Do you know where the place is located?"

"No, I don't!" she replied, with unabated feeling. "If I did, I'd have hauled the proprietor over the coals long before this. I've followed my husband over Harrison avenue way, but he always seems to suspect it, and he manages to give me the slip by going through some saloon. He has been losing money, and I'll not stand for it any longer. Money's too hard to get."

"I should say so," assented Keene. "We don't know of any secret gambling resort in the city."

"Oh, there's lots you people don't know!" cried the woman, with a low laugh, more than half a sneer.

"As a matter of fact, that is too true for a

joke," smiled Keene. "I'll tell you what you can do."

"What's that?"

"If you'll fix it so I can become acquainted with your husband, I will let him think that I'm a sport in the same direction, and in that way I doubtless can locate, if not get into, the place. After that, madam, you shall have no trouble from that resort, I promise you."

"Will you also promise not to give me away, and not to run my husband in if the place is raided?"

"I cannot promise not to run your husband in, for not to do so would itself be a give away," Keene explained, laughing lightly. "But I will see that his fine is remitted to you."

"That's good enough, sir!"

"It can be done quietly, you know, and the place closed for good and all. You will not need to appear in the matter at any time."

"So much the better!" exclaimed the woman, with eagerness. "When will you do it?"

"I first must get acquainted with your husband, that through him I may locate the resort. Where can I run across him?"

The woman hesitated for the fraction of a second, as if something more than this alone was involved; then answered, with a sharp glance into Keene's artfully indifferent eyes:

"We have a flat in the Fairview, on Dartmouth street. My husband's name is David McGee. But they call him Darby McGee. You'll often find him playing billiards in the hall under our flat."

"I will look him up within a day or two, Mrs. McGee," bowed Keene, with a grave complacency well calculated to dispel possible misgivings. "I am glad you have given us this information, and I will see that your husband does not suffer seriously, if arrests are made. There is one thing, by the way, that you must avoid."

"What's that?" she demanded, curtly.

"Your husband must not know of this plan."

"If he knows, you will be the one to tell him, not I."

"Then you may leave the matter to me. I'll get at it by to-morrow or next day."

"The sooner the better!" Mrs. McGee exclaimed, with asperity, as she turned to move away. "Don't compel me to come a second time, will you?"

"That is not our way of doing business," smiled Sheridan Keene, raising his hat.

With feelings that words could not easily describe, he watched Mrs. McGee from out the corner of his eye until she had turned in the direction of Scollay's square. Twice she looked back at him, but each time observed only that he was standing as motionless as she had found him, with his hands thrust into his coat pockets, and his gaze apparently fixed upon the pavement at his feet.

Then she vanished around the corner, and felt satisfied that her complaint against her wayward husband would be productive of only desirable results.

"All ready, Keene?"

The voice of Chief Inspector Watts brought Sheridan Keene out of his absorption. He wheeled sharply about, and startled the other with the words:

"All ready to advise a radical change of plan, Chief Watts, if you'll hear my reasons."

"What do you mean?"

"That I've been struck between wind and water, doubled up and tied in a knot, and left without pins to stand on," cried Keene, all in a single breath.

"You amaze me!" exclaimed Chief Watts.

"I am amazed at myself," cried Keene. "Come below and I'll tell you why. The wind sets from a new quarter."

They returned to the chief's office, held a conference occupying a full half hour, and at the end of it, Sheridan Keene left the headquarters building alone. Very evidently the contemplated raid was postponed, if not cancelled. Fifteen minutes later, Keene joined the shadow at the Harrison avenue termination of the side street, of whom he learned that no person had yet left the suspected house since the entrance of Payson nearly two hours earlier.

That Payson himself would emerge before long, and return to his office to make the changes necessary before going home, Keene felt absolutely certain.

It was then half-past five, and darkness had fallen. The temperature was lower, and the night threatened to be biting cold. The electric lights of brilliantly-lighted Harrison avenue burned with a gleam that was fairly painful, so cold was the winter air.

Sheridan Keene was right. He had waited scarce ten minutes with his companion, when Payson appeared as suddenly on the sidewalk of the suspected house as if, like the harlequin in the show, he had shot up from some mysterious region below. There was no mistaking that slouched figure, however, nor the shambling gait with which he was rapidly approaching.

"Away with you, Joe!" cried Keene, softly. "Go tell Mack the bird has flown and the game is off."

This meant that both officers were removed, and the house no longer under surveillance. A radical change of plan, indeed!

Keene crossed Harrison avenue, and waited near to make absolutely certain that his deductions were correct.

In a moment Payson came into better view, and started down town. He carried a square package wrapped in brown paper under his arm. It was like a covered box, about a foot square. He was hurrying, and his walk was now more natural. Evidently he felt that the darkness favored him.

Sheridan Keene let him go on ahead, then he hailed a cab from the corner of Dover street.

"To the Boston Postoffice, Devonshire side," he cried, sharply. "Don't favor your horse!"

In less than five minutes he sprang down at the point mentioned, and paid his fare.

Quickly crossing the street, he slipped into the rear court of the Arcade, mounted the several flights of back stairs, and with the key he previously had used he let himself into Payson's office and locked the door.

Every move had been made with the decision and assurance of a man who, if his earlier steps had indeed been somewhat uncertain, and in error, now was absolutely sure of where he stood.

Five more minutes passed.

Then a hurried step, less crafty and careful than usual, sounded on the rear stairs.

Though the office was in darkness, the detective quietly slipped into the closet, and held the door ajar.

Then a key grated in the lock of the rear door, which was quickly opened, closed, and relocked.

The two men, detective and malefactor, were alone in the room, and a critical time had arrived.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE MYSTERY IN THE NET.

Though the office was in darkness, Payson threw his package down upon his desk with that unerring precision which characterized his every movement. It fell with a bang and rattle, as that of a wooden box filled with loose articles. Then he felt on the wall and switched on the electric light, in the full flood of which he suddenly stood revealed.

His face was pale, his eyes aglow, his every motion indicative of excitement and haste. Yet his expression was that of relief and triumph; that of a man who now believed that he had removed the evidence which might have convicted him; that of a man, who now believed he had outwitted Sheridan Keene.

With a quick movement he tore off the disguise he wore, casting wig and mustache on the table.

"Thank God the danger is averted!" he joyously muttered, with the action. "Now for home and darling wife."

With the last word, his face became transfigured. He drew off his top-coat, sprang eagerly to the closet door, and drew it open.

Then Sheridan Keene stepped forth, with one hand of his hip-pocket.

"Hello, Payson!" he cried, quickly.

With a half-smothered cry, Payson recoiled as if dealt a sudden terrible blow. Not a vestige of color was left in his ghastly face. For an instant he hesitated, mute and shaken like an aspen leaf; then with a single bound, he reached the lower drawer of his desk.

"Stop where you are! Stand up!" cried Keene, with terrible sternness.

Payson glanced wildly over his shoulder, and his staring eyes met the ominous gleam of a revolver in the detective's steady hand.

"Stand up!" the latter repeated, sternly. "None of that, Philip Payson! If a gun is to be used in settling this matter, it will be mine, not yours!"

Payson rose to his feet, leaned heavily on his desk, then answered brokenly, like a man subdued and crushed by the resistless realization of ruin and exposure:

"It was to be used on myself—not you! My God, Keene, if you have any mercy, end this matter by shooting me dead where I stand!"

"The worst use one can put a man to is to kill him," quoted Keene, with grave severity. "Sit down there, Payson, and tell me what this means!"

"It means that I am hopelessly ruined," groaned Payson, dropping into a chair, and burying his hueless face in his hands.

"No man is hopelessly ruined, who has the virtue to repent and the energy to atone," Keene answered, sternly. "What is in this package?"

"Open it and see."

Keene thrust his revolver into his pocket, and quickly stripped the package of its covering. A wooden box was disclosed, the sliding cover of which he immediately opened. The contents consisted of several packs of cards, two metal deal-boxes, and fully five hundred circular chips of various colors, such as are required in gambling resorts.

"Humph!" Keene ejaculated, thrusting the box aside and seating himself on the corner of the desk. "That's precisely what I expected to find. Now, Philip Payson, look up here and tell me what this means, and what is back of all this masquerading?"

Like a man who felt that he had no alternative, Payson groaned, helplessly:

"It is too shameful, even, to tell."

"It must be told," Keene answered, sternly. "I want the whole story, without misrepresentation or evasion. It must be told to me, or told in court! You may make your choice."

Payson had in part recovered his composure, and now raised his white face and distressed eyes to the detective's stern gaze. Governing his voice with an effort, he replied, with painful humiliation:

"I will answer any question you care to ask."

"A wise conclusion!"

"What use to hope longer to hide my conduct?"

"None at all, Payson, and a clean breast of it will serve you best," said Keene, with less austerity. "What have you been doing?—running a gambling place?"

"Yes, I have."

"Where is it located?"

"Just off Harrison avenue."

"How long have you been there?"

"About a month. I came up here from Providence, where I had been located for a time."

"Then you have somewhat of a following in this business?"

"Somewhat, though under another name."

"That of Lipton Page?"

"Yes."

"What is this advertising business you have here?"

"That is perfectly legitimate," said Payson, humbly. "I give it part of my time. Most afternoons and nights are devoted to the other business."

"You have been playing a double game, then. A sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, have you?"

"In a way, yes."

"What is the occasion for that?" demanded Keene. "What's your object in thus masquerading?"

"Must I tell you that, also?" groaned Payson, wiping the perspiration from his pale face. "Will you not let the case drop, if I'll quit the illicit business for good and all?"

"I first want the whole story, Payson," said Keene, decisively. "After that, I will determine what action to take. Why have you been playing two parts in this affair?"

"I'll tell you why!" Payson now exclaimed, with sudden feeling.

"I've done so in order to hide the truth from a wife I love dearly, despite my transgression. It was chiefly my love for her, a desire to contribute liberally to her pleasures, that led me into gambling again."

"Again?" echoed Keene, with surprise.

"Then you previously had given it up, had you?"

"Yes, yes, on my word!" cried Payson, feelingly. "I'll tell you the whole story, Keene; and, for God's sake, don't disclose it, if it can be avoided."

"Go on," said Keene.

"Some years ago I ran a faro bank in New York, and won money—quite a little fortune. About that time I became acquainted with a girl from Albany, to whom my career was unknown. I fell in love with her—my God, you couldn't know how truly and deeply I loved her, and love her now!"

"Give me the whole story, Payson."

"I'll do so, on my word," was the sad reply. "I proposed to her, Keene, and was accepted. From that moment, I swore within myself, that I never again would be guilty of evil in any form. I closed up my place in New York, and started into advertising, and last spring I was married. My wife comes from honorable people, in high social standing, and you can imagine how carefully I aimed to prevent any exposure of my past."

"Natural, of course."

"I spent a lot of money in trying to establish a business in New York. It did not develop, and I went to Providence to give it a try in that city. Again I found myself running behind, all unbeknown to my wife, whom I scrupulously avoided giving cause for worry and anxiety. We had lived well on what money I had, but that was beginning to run low. It was at that time, Keene, as a desperate resort, that I resumed the old method. I figured out this masquerading scheme, and opened a faro bank in Providence, intending to run the same only until I could retrieve my losses in business, and get the latter on a firm basis."

"Yes; and then——"

"I won money in Providence," continued Payson, "until the play began to fall off, and then I decided to come to Boston for a time and chance being discovered by the police. Much of my Providence play came from Boston, and I thought I could do well here for a time, at least. So I have, and I've also got my advertising business on a better basis. That is the whole truth, Keene, as true as God hears me! I am a few thousand to the good again, and—and, if you'll drop the case,

Keene," he added, in accents of piteous appeal, "I'll take a solemn oath never to deal a card again, and to stick to my improving business. My God, Keene! the truth would break my wife's heart."

Keene gazed gravely at the white face of this man, down which tears of genuine grief were rolling; and he thought of the woman who had been at headquarters, and the true love and loyalty that had prompted her action.

"Have you had any occasion, Payson," he asked, "to raise money on any of your wife's property?"

"Two or three times, when the game went against me," Payson bowed; but I always gave her some fictitious reason."

"Then she has no idea of the true state of things, you think?"

"Oh, I am sure she has not! God forbid!"

Keene did not then undeceive him. Instead, he said, quite heartily:

"Perhaps I shall be inclined to take you on your word, Payson. Oh, don't build hopes on it yet. Tell me, first, what you know of a party named Darby McGee."

Payson subdued the gratitude he had been so eager to express, and cried suddenly:

"Darby McGee! I know him only as one of the players who cautiously visits my resort, and a man with whom gambling is a veritable mania. I have heard it said that he is a crook from out West, and that his picture is in the rogues' gallery; but I cannot vouch for the truth of it. I have mistrusted him, however, and frequently tried to prevent his visits; but he has had me rather at a disadvantage, since he could expose the place to the police if I refused him entrance."

"I see," nodded Keene, quickly adopting a design he had formed in mind, and now satisfied that Payson was telling the truth.

"Have you had any other relations with him?" he added.

"None whatever," Payson declared.

"Has he much money?"

"No, he does not appear to be well supplied with it; but he claims to expect some a little later. In return for chips with which to play in my game, he has been giving me collateral which has made me feel somewhat shaky about him."

"What form of collateral?"

"Diamonds, chiefly," Payson frankly explained. "Also one or two valuable rings."

"Did you ask him where he got them?"

"I did not. I never ask such questions over a layout."

Keene smiled faintly.

"Then you do not know where he obtained them?" he asked.

"No, I do not."

"Are you still holding the collateral he gave you?"

"Certainly, sir, since McGee has the right to redeem it. One piece, only, I have allowed my wife to wear, a valuable diamond ring."

"I see," nodded the detective, with a feeling of much satisfaction. "As regards that ring, and the balance of McGee's collateral, I don't want you to let go of any of it."

"I give you my word I will not, Detective Keene. It shall be held subject to your order."

"Very good," bowed Keene, approvingly; then he added, in a friendly way: "Now, Payson—do you honestly mean that you will hereafter stick to your legitimate business, do what is right, and make yourself a man your wife may be proud of, if I will help you out of this affair and suppress the facts involving you?"

Payson sprang up with an irrepressible cry.

"As God hears me, Keene, I pledge my word to do so!" he cried, with tears again starting to his eyes.

Sheridan Keene held out his hand, which

Payson seized with an eagerness quite indescribable.

"Oh, Mr. Keene!" he cried, "I will not forget this, I promise you."

"I truly believe you will not," said Keene, who really knew he had no very serious case against this man. "And in return, Payson, I want you to do me a service."

"I wish it were a hundred instead of one," cried Payson, fervently. "You have only to name it."

"When can you again start up your game, in case my discoveries are not made known?" demanded the detective.

"To-morrow night, easily!" exclaimed Payson, with a start of surprise.

"Will McGee be likely to visit you?"

"There is no doubt about that."

"Will he play?"

"Indeed, yes! I should have a difficult task to prevent him. He is crazed, as it were, by his passion for gambling."

"Has he sufficient money to begin with?"

"Probably, since he won a little last night."

"If he were to lose that, what would he do?"

"He would be compelled to quit or get more."

"Would he again offer you collateral?"

"Most likely. I think there is no doubt of it."

"Payson, can you so deal the cards that he would be compelled to lose?"

Payson colored slightly, then answered, with some hesitation:

"I can do so by dealing from a false box, but I never yet have done that in a game of mine. The game dealt on the square has always been good enough for me."

"I have no reason to doubt it," nodded Keene; "but have you one of the boxes designed for cheating players?"

"No, I have not."

"Can you possibly get one before to-morrow night?"

"Yes, I can borrow one, if it is necessary."

"It is necessary in this way, Payson," Keene gravely explained. "I wish to arrest McGee in the very act of offering some of this collateral. If you can force him to lose what money he has, you can bring this about for me. Will you do it?"

Payson stood in silent thought for a moment, with his pale face grown noticeably grave.

"Yes, I will do it for you, Detective Keene," he said, finally. "But I ask in return only, that the men I knowingly suffer to be present there at such a time may not be arrested for gambling."

"Your objection is that of a man who should himself have been in better business," said Keene, warmly. "I like you the better for having made it. No, Payson, there shall be no arrests save that of McGee, whom I want for a more serious matter. I shall require only that your players disperse at once, and that the place be permanently closed. After that, you shall have a chance to redeem yourself and become more worthy the woman you say you love. Now, what do you say?"

Again Payson impulsively took Keene's hand with both of his.

"I say this, at least, that you are one man in ten thousand, Detective Keene," he cried, with deep feeling. "Yes, I will do this for you, though yesterday I would have done it for no man on earth! Let me know of what your plan consists, and I will do my best to co-operate with you."

"My idea can be stated in a very few words," replied Sheridan Keene, toying carelessly with the box of chips near his elbow. "I am not known personally to this man McGee. I wish to be present while the game is in progress, and you can present me under

the assumed name of Perry. Have only a moderate number of players there, if you can so arrange it, and, if possible, make sure that none of them are acquainted with me. If there are any of your regular players by whom I am known by sight, you can easily learn the fact and exclude them. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Detective Keene. It will be a very easy matter to accomplish that much."

"Then, as regards Darby McGee, he must be made to lose until——"

"Until he produces collateral, of course!" Payson interrupted, with a laugh. "You may safely leave that part of the undertaking to me, Detective Keene."

"Very good!" exclaimed the latter. "Then you will make all the necessary arrangements for re-opening the game to-morrow night, will you?"

"Without fail! And for the last time, good friend that you have been, as surely as God hears me!"

"I honestly believe you mean it, Payson," said Keene, with a nod of approval.

"Indeed, sir, my future conduct shall prove that I mean it! To-morrow night, then! The house, by the way, is on——"

"I know the house!" interposed Keene, with a short, dry laugh.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OTHER GAME IN THE NET.

Before leaving Payson's office that evening, Sheridan Keene had been instructed how to play the game he was about to witness; and at eight o'clock the following night the resort near Harrison avenue was again in operation.

The scene was a familiar one to the eyes of all except Sheridan Keene, who had been introduced into the place by Payson himself, as a friend who had recently arrived from New York.

The room was a large, square chamber at the rear of the house, and on the second floor. The outer blinds were closed and securely fastened, while heavy tapestry draperies before each of the two windows effectually prevented observation of the faintest rays of light by any person outside.

Most of the house was void of furnishings; the floor in this room was richly carpeted. The various pieces of furniture were new and attractive. A couch stood near the wall at one side, while opposite this was a tall sideboard, laden with glasses and decanters.

In the middle of the floor was a long table, with a raised layout in the centre, which consists of a suit of cards painted on enameled cloth. Above this, and pendant from the ceiling, was a row of several lights, the rays of which were diverted by a hood of tin, which served to throw a brilliant light upon the service of the table and layout, and leave the other portions of the room in comparative obscurity.

Payson, who was to deal his own game at just this time, was seated back of this table, with a deal-box before him, and a stack of chips near by. At one side and in an elevated chair, sat a man named Skilling, who was to act as a lookout for the game, and whose duty it is to watch against errors in the taking and paying of bets.

In a chair at one end of the table was a short man who kept the cues on a cue-rack, which laid before him on the table and in plain view of all the players. The latter, by consulting this cue-rack, can easily tell what cards have been dealt from the pack and what remain in the deal-box.

Six players only were in the room. These were seated along the side of the table directly opposite Payson, each with a supply of chips before him or placed in bets upon the cards of the layout. Their several faces depicted various emotions, as fortune smiled or

frowned, and the most of them were grave and earnest, with a paleness accentuated by the strong light from above.

Sheridan Keene occupied a chair near the middle of the table and appeared at all times interested only in the plays he himself was making.

The chair to his left was occupied by Darby McGee. In the face of this man was betrayed the passion which had become his master over all other aspirations. His lips were drawn, his cheeks pale, his eyes abnormally bright and fixed with constant watchfulness either upon the box from which Payson's deft fingers pushed card after card, or upon the checks representing his bets on the layout.

That the man was in ill-humor and that the game was going against him, were apparent both in his bitter, frowning countenance and his words at the end of one of these deals.

"Shuffle those cards, Page!" he cried, sharply, looking up with a scowl. "The infernal pasteboards are crazy or else we all are up against a brace! I won only a single bet in that whole deal."

"You always think you are up against a brace game, Darby, when you are losing," rejoined Payson, with quiet sarcasm.

"Not by a long shot!"

"You want to learn to take your medicine, Darby, my boy," put in one of the players, in a dryly-malicious way. "Do you expect always to win?"

"I haven't won in this infernal joint since it has opened," retorted McGee, sharply.

"There is no rope on you with which we drag you in here," said Payson, indifferently, as he ran the cards into the box for another deal. "The ten is the top, John," he added to the cue-keeper, who marked off the button with a pencil.

"No rope!" exclaimed McGee, with a re-

sentful flash of his feverish eyes. "I know that as well as you do, Lippie Page; but I shall continue to come here while you run, and I'd not advise you to try freezing me at the peek! If you do, you know what will happen."

"Oh, your money is as good to me as any other man's, Darby," was the smiling rejoinder. "I take if I win, and I pay if I lose. You can get no better service than that wherever you go. Are you all ready, gentlemen?"

"Turn away!" growled one, impatiently.

"What do you say, Perry?"

"Make the turn," nodded Keene, carelessly. "I never set a bet at the top of the box. I play doubles and cases only."

McGee glanced at him aside, frowning darkly, for Keene had been winning by reversing McGee's play.

"I know my money is as good as any man's," the latter answered, bitterly. "I know that as well as you, Lippie; but you've already won about all the cash I have with me."

Keene reached over and placed a bet, and Payson made another turn from the box.

"Pay on the queen," said the lookout, quietly.

"You know what men do after they have gone broke, don't you, Darby?" asked Payson, taking up McGee's remark after an interval of several seconds.

"Aye, I know what they do," was the reply; "but I suppose I still can borrow on collat., can't I?"

"I am holding a good deal of your stuff just now," returned Payson.

"It is all worth what you have loaned on it, isn't it?"

"If not, I wouldn't have taken it at all."

"What are you growling about, then? I will redeem it sooner or later. Hold on, there, cues! how many jacks in?"

"The jack is a case, sir," replied the cue-keeper, courteously.

"Wait a bit, Page!"

And Darby McGee made a hurried shift of his bets and plunged on the case jack.

He would have won the bet, moreover, had it not been for the adroit work of Philip Payson, and the hopeless game against which he was playing. When the card showed a loser, and it could not possibly show otherwise, McGee's features turned darker than ever and an oath broke hoarsely from his dry lips.

Without a change of his countenance or in his quiet and deliberate manner, Payson took in the bet and stood the stack of checks in the check-rack.

"You are guessing in poor form to-night, Darby, for a fact," he said, quietly; but the other players gave scarce a moment's attention to the remark or the incident.

McGee made no response. His checks were running low for the third time, and now he went again to his pocket for money.

That he drew out a solitary ten-dollar bill led Sheridan Keene to believe that the end for which he had come there was rapidly approaching. He arose and went to the side-board, ostensibly for a drink. When he returned, at the end of two or three minutes, he had secured one manacle of a pair of handcuffs to his own left wrist, holding the other in his left hand, which he kept out of observation. Then he resumed his seat at the table.

For ten minutes or more the game continued, with varying results for most of the players; but the fate of Darby McGee was constantly to lose.

Reaching across the layout with his right hand, Sheridan Keene placed half a dozen checks on the high card.

"Hold on!" exclaimed one of the players, as Payson was about to make the next turn. "What did the last king do?"

Payson's white hand, which had been hovering over the deal box, descended to the cards already played, which he ran rapidly over with his finger.

"Give me a marker for the stack of checks on the seven, to play the king a winner."

Payson tossed the marker across the layout.

Something seemed to impress Darby McGee that the man was placing his money right. He impulsively dove down to the fob pocket of his pants, at the same time crying, hurriedly:

"Wait a bit, Page; hang it! I want a bet on that king. Here, I'll give you security for two more stacks of checks. The diamond alone is worth twice that."

"All right, Darby, but this will be the last time."

"Last time goes! Let's have the checks."

Payson deliberately passed the checks over the layout, at the same time taking up a ring which McGee had laid down.

"Wait just a minute," cried the latter, hurriedly, with his white face drawn and pinched by excitement. "Give me a copper! Don't make a turn till I have placed this bet! Give me a copper, I say! I want to heel the checks from the jack to the king!"

As he spoke he reached out over the layout to set his bet.

At the same moment Sheridan Keene also thrust his left arm out across the layout, and instantly clasped the loose manacle on the wrist of the suspected man, securing his arm to his own.

"Cash your chips, Darby, instead of heeling them!" he cried, sternly. "You are my prisoner!"

His ringing voice and the startling incident brought every player in the room to his feet.

"Your prisoner!" gasped McGee, trying in vain to shrink from the cold bracelet that

felt like ice against his hot flesh. "What do you mean? Who are you? Why am I arrested?"

Keene jerked the dismayed and ghastly fellow closer to him, then flashed a commanding glance over all observers.

"I am Detective Keene, of the secret service, since you wish to know who I am," he answered, sternly. "I want none of you gentlemen, and you had best get out of here as speedily as possible. As for you, McGee, I want you for robbing the store of Kennedy & Hicks two weeks ago last Tuesday night. The rest of you depart at once or arrests will be the consequence. Close up this place immediately, Mr. Page. This game is closed down—for good and all!"

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Within another half-hour the gambling place off Harrison avenue was deserted and in darkness, and Darby McGee occupied a cell in the Tombs. It then was nine o'clock.

At ten, just one hour later, Sheridan Keene brought Mrs. McGee into the private office of Chief Inspector Watts and gave her into custody.

"It is precisely as we finally suspected, Chief Watts!" he exclaimed, as the pale yet wrathful woman took the seat to which he led her. "Here is our lover of chocolate, and I found in her flat ample evidence to sustain our case against her and her husband."

"What have you to say for yourself, Mrs. McGee?" demanded Chief Watts, sternly.

"I've nothing to say for myself," Mrs. McGee answered, with a vindictiveness surpassing description. "But I have something to say to that man there, if ever I catch him alone!"

Sheridan Keene laughed lightly and gave his head a toss.

"You once had a quiet little talk with me,

my lady, and this is one of the results of it. It is no fault of mine that you took pains to put your head in the lion's mouth. You follow your trade, you know, and we follow ours. If you don't want us to run you down, you should keep to the path of virtue and out of the highway of vice."

"Never mind the woman, Keene," interposed Chief Watts. "What did you find in her flat at the Fairview?"

"We have located much of the stolen property, chief," Keene hastened to reply, "which the other inspectors have already removed and have in charge. I think, with that which Philip Payson has in his possession, the recovery will be nearly complete."

"That is excellent," cried Chief Watts, heartily. "And the whole case, despite our first miscalculations, has been a very clever little piece of work."

"So I think, chief, for a fact!"

"Call an officer now, if you please, and have this woman removed. We will get the whole truth from her later."

And the whole truth, as they got it and verified it, may be briefly added.

There was absolutely no connection between the two mysteries which Chief Watts and Detective Keene had so curiously taken in one net, although a seeming relation between them had at first occasioned some miscalculations. From the moment of Mrs. McGee's complaint against her husband, however, Sheridan Keene, of course, suspected the game to which McGee's letter had referred, and thereafter had the case well in hand.

McGee was found, indeed, to be a crook from the West, who chanced to be in Boston and to observe the vacant tenement over the store of Kennedy & Hicks. It was he who called upon Kelcey for the key, and looked the place over alone. The manner of the break had been that so shrewdly suspected

by Chief Watts, and McGee's only accomplice was his own wife. Both are now doing time for the crime.

The story told by Philip Payson was true to the letter, and partly in return for the service rendered Keene, and partly because of his genuine remorse and repentance, the facts were never disclosed to Payson's wife.

And it here may be added that he now has established a prosperous business and gives promise of becoming all that he had pledged himself to Sheridan Keene.

Indeed, the detective now places Philip Payson and his lovely and lovable wife among his most enjoyable friends.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 10) will contain the story of the celebrated Cold Storage case, one of the most mysterious cases ever undertaken by Chief Watts and his force. The story will be entitled "A Frozen Clue; or, The Cold Storage Mystery."

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